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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000594

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [MASS](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: SENATOR NELSON TALKS DRUGS, SOFA, WITH PRESIDENT
KOROMA

REF: A. FREETOWN 552
[1](#)B. FREETOWN 578

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b/d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Ambassador and Senator Bill Nelson met with President Koroma on December 15 to discuss security sector issues, including the increase in narcotics trafficking in Sierra Leone and the long-pending Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). While Koroma wouldn't commit to taking immediate action on either issue, he made positive noises that they would be resolved in the near future. A subsequent meeting with representatives from the Office of National Security further highlighted the need for greater USG investment in supporting Sierra Leone's stability. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) In an audience with the President on December 15, Ambassador and Senator Nelson applauded Koroma's efforts to entrench democracy, support political stability and economic growth, fight corruption, and address security threats. Koroma acknowledged the praise, stating his particular pride regarding the free and fair elections in Sierra Leone in 2007 and 2008, and peaceful transition of power from the governing to the opposition party. He congratulated the delegation on the recent Presidential elections, thanking the American people for their ongoing support of Sierra Leone, and expressing his intent to maintain the excellent bilateral relationships we currently enjoy.

KOROMA'S NARCOTICS CONCERNS

[1](#)3. (C) The President expressed his concerns about the increased narcotics transit through Sierra Leone, stating that the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) needs support to improve their surveillance capabilities. Senator Nelson sympathized, discussing various interdiction challenges. He mentioned the significant assistance the DEA is providing in Ghana, and said that he hopes a similar level of support can be provided to Sierra Leone.

[1](#)4. (C) Senator Nelson broached the subject of the pending request to expel two individuals, currently in Sierra Leonean custody, to face drugs-related charges in the U.S. (reftel A). Koroma said that he agrees with the expulsion in principle, but that several issues will need to be addressed before he gives his final approval. He also mentioned that the individuals in question are now facing drugs charges in Sierra Leone's High Court, but did not imply that this could impede their expulsion.

SIGNING THE SOFA

[1](#)5. (C) The Senator enquired about the pending SOFA (reftel B), asking the President if the negotiations to sign it are

coming along to his satisfaction. Koroma replied that there has been initial engagement on the topic, and hopes that this continues. He expressed his particular interest in receiving further military from the USG. The Ambassador reminded the President that signing the SOFA will ease the way for increased assistance. The Acting Foreign Minister, Vandí Minah, stated that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has no objection to signing the SOFA, and will speak with the Attorney General about advancing the discussions.

SECURITY SECTOR ISSUES FROM AN OPS PERSPECTIVE

¶6. (C) The Ambassador hosted two representatives from the Government of Sierra Leone's security sector at a lunch in honor of Senator Nelson. Christopher John, Deputy Director of the Office of National Security, and Abdullai Mustapha, Central Intelligence and Security Unit Director, discussed smuggling, maritime security, and their limited investigative and operational capacity. Corruption was also a topic of discussion, and Mustapha relayed the challenges of maintaining unit integrity when low-paid officers are frequently on the receiving end of bribe attempts.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) President Koroma hosted a cordial meeting for Codel Nelson, speaking eloquently about the development challenges facing Sierra Leone and the public's need for tangible social

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and economic progress. Though he seemed somewhat unfamiliar with the SOFA issue, he was vocal about his desire to address the growing narcotics problem. Identifying our bilateral partnership on this issue, he said "we're all in this together." His comment regarding agreement with the expulsion request in principle represents a step forward in our negotiation process, and post will continue to work toward this end upon the President's return from the ECOWAS Summit December 21. Senator Nelson's timely visit provided an opportunity to discuss pressing issues, as well as reinforce our already strong diplomatic relationship. End Comment.

¶8. (U) Codel Nelson did not clear this message prior to departure.
PERRY